System and Method for Facilitating Targeted Marketing Over a Telecommunications Network

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FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates generally to electronic data processing for business applications, and relates more particularly to the distribution or redemption of coupons, or other incentive or promotional programs.

DESCRIPTION OF THE RELATED ART

Merchants often have difficulty in targeting their marketing to relevant consumer segments. For example, one existing mass coupon distributor reports that it is paid on a per-coupon-distributed basis for their core product. As of March 2000, the company reported revenues of $350.9M. Its core domestic product generated $259.667M, or 74% of its revenue. With 165,000,000 customers a week, its reported revenue per customer was just $0.03 with approximate revenue per coupon of just $0.01 (assuming three coupons per customer).

The present invention addresses certain shortcomings in existing technologies for distribution of coupons.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

According to certain embodiments of the present invention, a system and method for facilitating targeted marketing over a telecommunications network includes receiving a request (such as a toll free call) from an originating party to a terminating party, determining the identity of the terminating party, determining targeted marketing material based at least on the identity of the terminating party, and providing the targeted marketing material to the originating party.

These aspects and other objects, features, and advantages of the present invention are described in the following Detailed Description which is to be read in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The invention will be described with reference to the accompanying figures, of

5   which:

FIG. 1 is a schematic block diagram of an exemplary network for use with the present invention;

10   FIG. 2 is a representation of an exemplary directory database used by the central controller of FIG. 1;

FIG. 3 is a representation of an exemplary targeted marketing database used by the central controller of FIG. 1;

15   FIG. 4 is a representation of an exemplary request information database used by the central controller of FIG. 1; and

FIG. 5 is an exemplary method for facilitating targeted marketing over a network

20   performed by the central server of FIG. 1.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is a method and system for facilitating targeted

25   marketing over a telecommunications network. The system includes a central controller

that is capable of receiving data communication (such as voice communication, data

(DNS), XML, Digital Object Identifiers (DOI), and/or the like) from an originating party

to a terminating party. The identity of the terminating party is established and targeted

marketing material (such as a coupon) for the terminating party or a competitor of the

30   terminating party, is offered to the originating party.

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In one example of the use of the present invention, a central controller functioning as a local data exchange may receive an information request (such as using a toll free phone call) from a customer to an airline booking and reservation center. In the process of transferring the request to the appropriate network service provider, the central

5   controller determines the identity of the terminating party (such as the airline call center) by querying its own request directory database. Having determined the identity of the airline, the central controller next determines targeted marketing material based on the identity of the airline. In one exemplary embodiment, the targeted marketing material may be a coupon for a competing airline good for any national roundtrip ticket that is

10   booked within the upcoming six months. The coupon is then provided to the customer, via any data communication means, such as via email, typical postal mail, the Internet, and/or the like.

Referring to FIG. 1, the originating party 11 may be any entity capable of originating a request, such as a phone call or an Internet connection, in accordance with

15   the invention. For example, the originating party 11 may be a consumer using his or her private telephone, or Internet account with a suitable Internet Service Provider (ISP).

The central controller 16 may be any entity capable of receiving, switching and transferring requests from one entity to another. For example, the central controller 16 may be a local exchange carrier, an ISP, an automated data manager, and/or

20   the like.

Communication between the central controller 16 and the originating party 11 may take place over a dedicated network 12, or over the Internet 13 using any data transfer mechanism.

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The network service provider 14 may be any entity capable of receiving

and delivering a data request from the central controller 16 to a terminating party 15.

The terminating party 15 may be any entity capable of receiving a request

from a network service provider 14. For example, the terminating party 15 may be a

5   merchant or service provider such as an Airline registration center, a computer

merchant's product sales center, and the like.

FIG. 2 is a tabular representation of the directory database 20 depicted in

FIG. 1. The directory database may contain the following exemplary fields: an identifier

field 21 storing a particular identifier and a terminating party field 22 for storing an

10   identification of the party associated with the identifier.

FIG. 3 is a tabular representation of the targeted marketing database 30

depicted in FIG. 1. The targeted marketing database may contain the following

exemplary fields: company field 31, company identifiers field 32, coupon identification

(ID) field 33, coupon field 34 and/or the like.

15   The company field 31 stores information relating to the name of a

company for which marketing information is available.

The related company identifier numbers field 32 stores the identifying

information that may trigger the provisioning of marketing material related to the

company, or a competitor of the company. For example, if the company is "DELL

20   COMPUTER," one of the identifiers stored in this field 32 may be COMPAQ

COMPUTER INC.'s toll free phone number, or the web page address of COMPAQ

COMPUTER INC.

The coupon identification (ID) field 33 stores a unique coupon identifier associated with a coupon that may be provided on behalf of the company. In some embodiments of the invention, other forms of marketing material besides or in addition to coupons may be stored in this database 30.

5   The coupon field 34 stores information about the coupon identified by the coupon ID in field 33. For example, this field 34 may store the terms and conditions associated with the coupon.

FIG. 4 is a tabular representation of the request information database 40 depicted in FIG. 1. The request information database 40 may contain the following

10   exemplary fields: optional date/time field (not shown), automatic number identification/Internet Protocol (ANI/IP) address field 41, contact information field 42, originating party contact field 43, targeted marketing field 44 and/or the like.

An optional date/time field (not shown) may store information related to the date and time at which the central controller 16 received the toll-free call from the

15   originating party 11.

The automatic number identification/Internet Protocol (ANI / IP) address field 41 stores information related to the phone number or IP address of the device used by the originating party 11 to contact the central controller 16. In embodiments where the originating party 11 uses a phone to contact the central controller 16, this address

20   field may store the phone number (or Billing Number) associated with the phone. In embodiments where the originating party 11 uses a device capable of initiating an Internet-based connection, this address field 41 may store the IP address of the device.

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The contact information field 42 stores information related to the contact mechanism employed by the originating party.

The originating party contact field 43 stores contact information related to the originating party 11. For example, the originating party 11 may provide the central controller 16 with an e-mail address by spelling the email address over the phone. The central controller 16 may then record the spelling of the e-mail address and translate the voice recording into text using a speech recognition program.

The targeted marketing field 44 stores information related to the targeted marketing material provided to the originating party 11. For example, this field 44 may store the coupon ID associated with the coupon provided to the originating party 11 according to present invention.

It should be noted that the user information is collected related to the requests made and the requests may be made using appropriate search engines and other locations where users interact with networks by using devices, such as phone calls and file transfers. The identity and context of the destination is correlated to specific interest by the user which can be dramatically enhanced by the cross reference of such destinations to their Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) classification and/or their DOI product information.

All such transactions are pre-authorized by the users or subscribers to the search engine or other service providers and allow such service provider to provide targeted product and industry information to their customers as well as much more accurate search results since it has the context of the interests and industries of interest to which that specific user belongs and it can cross reference its responses to be prioritized

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by such historical information. Such systems can be used by corporate networks as well

to build specialized knowledge nets with background profiles of employees and their

interests.

FIG. 5 is a flow chart describing a method 50 performed by the central

5   controller 16 according to the present invention.

At step 51, a connection request is received from the originating party 11.

According to the present invention, the central controller 16 receives the connection

request from an originating party 11 to a terminating party 15. The request may reach the

central controller 16 from the PSTN (normal phone call), from the Internet, and the like.

10   Next, at step 52, the central controller 16 determines the identity of the

terminating party 15 by querying the directory database 20 that stores information

associating contact information with the identities of the parties.

Next, at step 53, based on the identity of the terminating party 15, the

central controller 16 determines appropriate targeted marketing material to be provided to

15   the originating party 11. For example, the targeted marketing database 30 may be

accessed and queried using the identity of the terminating party 15.

Alternatively, or in addition thereto, the central controller 16 may use

cookies, ANI, forwarded information from other sources (e.g. Web sites), voice

recognition, and the like in determining targeted marketing material. For example, in a

20   VoIP embodiment, the system may identify cookies stored on the originating parties

computer and use the identity of those cookies in the determination of targeted marketing

material. In another example, the originating party's IP address may be used to help

determine targeted marketing material. The system may access a database that stores

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information linking a given IP address with Web sites visited by that address. Such

information may be useful in determining targeted marketing material. In general,

determining the identity of the originating party 11 may prove useful in determining

targeted marketing material.

5   The method 50 may continue to step 54 where the central controller 16

may store information associated with the originating party 11, the terminating party 15,

the targeted marketing material, and the like in the appropriate field of the information

database 40. This information may be useful for various purposes, such as for billing

purposes, to determine the effectiveness of the targeted marketing by tracking the

10   originating parties future behavior, and/or the like.

Next, at step 55, the central controller 16 queries a routing database (not

shown) in order to determine the network service provider associated with the toll-free

number. The routing database may have fields correlating the dialed phone number to

the network service provider, or the like. Based on the network service provider, the

15   central controller 16 switches the call appropriately.

Finally, at step 56, having determined targeted marketing material, the

central controller 16 then provides the material to the originating party 11. There are a

number of ways whereby the targeted marketing material may be provided to the

originating party.

20   In one embodiment, the originating party 11 may provide the central

controller 16 with his or her e-mail address, and the central controller 16 may e-mail the

targeted marketing material to the e-mail address. The e-mail address may be received

before, during or after the initial request is made. For example, the originating party 11

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may be informed before the request to the terminating party 15 that he or she should stay

on the line after making the information request to receive the money saving coupons. At

the end of the connection, the central controller 16 may sever the connection with the

terminating party 15 and prompt the originating party 11 to enter his or her e-mail

5   address into the communicating device, at which point the central controller 16 may

record the originating party's response and analyze it using an appropriate software (such

as a speech recognition program) in order to convert the entered response/data into

computer-readable data. Alternatively, the originating party 11 may speak or enter their

physical home address, and the central controller 16 may arrange for the targeted

10   marketing material to be delivered to his or her home by first class mail or the like.

In another exemplary embodiment, before, during or after the call, the

central controller 16 may issue the originating party 11 a code and notify the originating

party 11 that he or she may enter the code at a specified Web site in order to receive the

targeted marketing material. For example, an originating party 11 who calls DELTA

15   AIRLINES may be given a code to enter into the AMERICAN AIRLINES Web site. By

entering the code, the originating party 11 may receive a discounted fare for a specified

flight.

In a VoIP embodiment, where the originating party 11 is utilizing, for

example, a personal computer (PC), the targeted marketing material may be

20   communicated to the originating party 11 via a pop-up window that appears on the

monitor of the PC. Such a window may appear before, during or after the connection is

completed.

In certain embodiments, the provision of targeted marketing material may include actually switching the originating party's call from one terminating party 15 to another. For example, a customer may make a connection to DELTA AIRLINE's reservation center only to find that the current hold time is 25 minutes. The central

5   controller 16 may offer to switch the customer to UNITED AIRLINE's reservation center, which may have only a 5 minute hold time. In another embodiment, the central controller 16 may switch the call automatically. The central controller may receive a fee or the like from the new terminating party 15 for the redirected call.

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